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ABSTRACT

The case study presented in this paper describes and articulates a beginning teacher's perceptions of the key rules, roles, and relationships within the context of the technical culture of an inner city elementary school. Data were collected through interviews, participant observations, and teacher and school produced documents. Experienced teachers, the principal, assistant principal, and counselor also supplied information. Results provided an understanding of the experiences of first-year teachers and the world in which they work and revealed the teacher's subjective reality, and perceptions and practices within that reality. In addition, it was determined that the beginning teacher's reality was largely derived from perceptions of what she believed the rules, roles, and relationships to be rather than the actual technical subskills delineated on a checklist or in the school handbook. Based on evidence from the investigation, it was suggested that assistance to beginning teachers be given within the context of the situation rather than any mythological uniform teaching culture. While checklists and other generic instruments may be helpful, this study emphasizes the importance of the subtle and complex nature of a first-year teacher's experience and socialization within the context of a technical culture. (Contains 25 references.) (LL)

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PERCEPTIONS OF A BEGINNING TEACHER: EXPLORING SUBJECTIVE REALITY

by
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Perceptions of a Beginning Teacher: Exploring Subjective Reality

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Objectives

Exploring the context of schools and classrooms while restructuring them to better meet the needs of students and teachers is a major theme in American education today. The notion of restructuring schools is complex and often misunderstood, yet it is one area that demands examination because of unanswered questions relative to a school's technical culture and a beginning teacher's transition into it. Indeed, as beginning teachers enter the profession, they encounter work places which challenge the very aims of educational restructuring. When a beginning teacher's subjective reality is examined with regard to her perceptions of the rules and the related roles and relationships within a specific technical culture, several challenging revelations emerge with implications toward restructuring schools and the nature of schools themselves (Corbett, 1990).

A major limitation of prior research on teacher induction is that it limits itself to self-reported data such as surveys (see Eisner, 1991; Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). With this in mind, Hoffman and O'Neal (1985) advocate studies that use classroom observation with structured follow-up interviews with the teachers for more probing insight into teachers' worlds. Other researchers suggest looking at school context variables as well as examining the subjective realities of teachers to gain a deeper perspective on the meaning and implications of survey or observational data (Greenberg & Erly, 1989). Veenman (1984), as he concludes his synthesis of literature on the perceived problems of beginning teachers, states, "Future research on the beginning teacher and the process of beginning to teach should place a high priority on description of teachers and on the contexts in which they work" (pp. 162-163). He continues, "A socialization framework is needed to give attention to changes in the 'context of institutional settings'" (p. 164). Too few studies investigate teachers' subjective realities, not to mention the technical cultures in which they find themselves.

Following this advice, in broad terms, the larger study (Lee, 1993) explored how a beginning teacher was acculturated into the social organization of an elementary school by delineating what a beginning teacher's perceptions were and how she formed them and then analyzing them within the context of the school's social

organization–specifically, the technical culture, or the processes necessary to accomplish the organization's goals (Kleinsasser, 1989, 1993; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). The primary objectives of this paper include: 1) describing a beginning teacher's perceptions of the key relationships within her technical culture; 2) identifying and analyzing rules which the beginning teacher found pertinent within her work place; 3) revealing the beginning teacher's perceived role within the technical culture; and 4) understanding how a beginning teacher's beliefs and practices interacted within the school's technical culture.

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

Research Paradigms

Eisner (1991) suggests that one paradigm does not sufficiently address the complex world. To learn about the school context only through positivist paradigms limits the discovery of knowledge about it. Experimentation is not always convenient or possible in schools. Consequently, knowledge of schools must be gained through means other than those advocated by a positivist methodology (see Eisner, 1991). Similarly, researchers suggest the body of knowledge in education is context-dependent and idiosyncratic and that cultures of schools differ from one another, demanding sensitive and interactive data collection (see Eisner, 1991; Zeichner, et al., 1987). Merriam (1988) claims, "Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities–that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring" (p. 17).

It follows, then, that exploring the world of subjective realities of teachers is a difficult task. The very nature of multiple realities demands careful, thoughtful collection and analysis of data. Triangulation is one means of overcoming any weaknesses of one method of data collection. Mathison (1988) explains triangulation is an effective means of determining if what the data seem to say is really what they say. She further explains that triangulation can reveal not only convergence but inconsistencies and contradictions among the data. Inconsistencies and contradictions need not discount the value of the data; rather, Mathison contends, they further illuminate the value of the data, allowing for a more accurate analysis and interpretation (see also Eisner, 1991).

Social Organizational Theory

Social organizational theory provides an underpinning for any study which seeks to explore teachers' worlds. It helps to explain and understand how outsiders become insiders, how people learn their roles and their place within the existing culture, and the process by which people learn the values, norms, and customs (i.e., rules, roles, and relationships) of an organization (Corbett, 1990; Deal & Chatman, 1989). In essence, the social organization of a school functions as an instrument by which those involved--namely, teachers, students, parents, administrators, and support staff--can shape their reality. Within that reality, what one perceives to be as less important would tend to be neglected or trivialized. How success is defined, then, becomes crucial to understanding the social organization of the school. Thus, the organization is defined by those interacting within it.

Technical Cultures

The theoretical construct of the technical culture is helpful in understanding the social organization of the school (Lortie, 1975). How tasks are accomplished is largely determined by the people within the technical culture. The extent to which the social organization's goals are clear and attainable to those working within it, the technical cultures in schools can be characterized as *certain* or *uncertain*. The more uniformly and effectively the organization's goals are understood and can be achieved, the more *certain* the technical culture. Additionally, technical cultures can be characterized as *routine* or *nonroutine*. In *routine* technical cultures, teachers tend to "perform standardized tasks over and over, despite variations in the students they serve," whereas teachers in *nonroutine* technical cultures tend toward experimentation and collaborative exploration of different approaches to teaching different students (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 105; see also Kleinsasser, 1989, 1993).

Methods

Qualitative research seeks to explore reality from a holistic perspective. To holistically investigate a teacher or school, the researcher must gain a deep, insightful understanding of the subject being studied, considering the context rather than specific variables and finding a data base of information rather than confirming preconceived suspicions (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). Following an inductive approach, gathering thick, descriptive data, this investigation seeks to "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under

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study" (Merriam, p. 7). In short, the case study is a way to investigate complex social situations in which multiple variables of unknown significance exist and in which reality is created by the subjects [multiple interpretations of reality] involved as a result of the interaction within the context of the situation. Following an embedded case study model (Yin, 1984), this study examines the setting, in this case, an elementary school, and a beginning teacher within it. Rather than relying on self-reports, multiple data collection methods are employed. Descriptive methods include interviews, observations, and documents (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1988).

Thirteen structured, open-ended interviews each lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes were conducted from August through February with the content of later interviews derived from earlier interviews and observations. Intervals between interviews were not rigidly set, but they were often the function of personal schedules and the school calendar. The interviews, as were all data collection, terminated in mid-February, nearly seven months after collection began, as the data began to seem saturated with redundant information (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Beginning in December, the interviews also incorporated "member checks" or taking the data and interpretations back to the subject and discussing their plausibility. This was often accomplished by giving the beginning teacher copies of interview transcripts, allowing her to provide feedback, and then responding with further questions to her feedback (see Bullough, 1989; Merriam, 1988).

Participant observations, each lasting approximately one hour, were made approximately once each month from August through February. As participant observer, the researcher attempted to describe the setting, participant, activities and interactions, and subtle factors (Merriam, 1988). In this study, the researcher worked as a part-time observer by dropping in to see what was occurring rather than participating regularly in a full partnership with the beginning teacher. The relationship between the researcher and the beginning teacher was primarily as researcher-subject rather than peer although as the study neared its final data collection stage, the researcher and subject discussed findings together. Observation data began as hand-written field notes which were typed, coded, and interpreted through Corbett's (1990) theoretical framework of rules, roles, and relationships. (A more extensive discussion of the analysis appears below.) Through the collection of data, the researcher explored how the beginning teacher performed her daily duties, made decisions, and perceived the

reality of her context in which she worked. These observations provided descriptive data that documented the beginning teacher's perceptions as recorded in the interviews.

Finally, physical evidence in the form of teacher and school-produced documents (e.g., memos, handbooks, grade books) was collected from August through February. Guba and Lincoln (1981) assert using documents "lends contextual richness and helps to ground an inquiry in the milieu of the writer" (p. 234). Documents produced by both the teacher and school were used. These included school handbooks, teacher handbooks, memos, grade record books, planning books, and various teacher-parent communiques. Clarification of these documents was sought during interviews with the beginning teacher. The strength of this component of the data collection process is that documents offered physical examples of the beginning teacher's beliefs and practices as well as evidence of the school's technical culture and were not altered by the investigator, whereas the interview and observation process was more vulnerable to some investigator influence. While limited, these documents provided a useful means by which a more objective analysis of interview and observation data could be accomplished.

In the minds of many, data analysis in the qualitative realm remains somewhat troublesome if not enigmatic. Indeed, Constas (1992) asserts, "Contrary to what some have claimed, categories do not simply 'emerge' from the data. In actuality, categories are created, and meanings attributed by researcher who, wittingly or unwittingly, embrace a particular configuration of analytical preferences....The absence of such information may vitiate the clarity of a given empirical presentation" (p. 254). Certainly, a description of the negotiations for "meanings within the particular domain or context under study" are in order and, in fact, illuminate the intentions and through processes of the researcher to better clarify the data presented (p. 255).

Using Constas' (1992) "documentational approach for category development" as a means to account for the method by which categories are derived and solidified, the process followed in the project is outlined. The origination of the categories (i.e., rules, roles, and relationships) in this investigation was within the previous research and published literature (Corbett, 1990). These categories can be verified or justified by means of external verification, and they demonstrate "functional consistency" throughout the analysis, that is, they appear to be logically connected by function. Each category's nomination component, that is, its source for its name, again derives directly from the literature and previous research. Finally, some of the categories were designated

a priori, and others were designated through an interactive process of model analysis (Spradley, 1979) as themes and similarities across the multiple data sources led to further manipulation of the categories, resulting in a descriptive picture of the beginning teacher and her work place. The process by which this development occurred was by no means clearly intuitive, not was it totally rational; rather, it strove to combine pre-existing conceptualizations of the data with the context under consideration.

The unit of study in this embedded case investigation was an elementary school built in 1952, located in an inner city with a population of approximately 65,000 people. Westside Elementary School (a pseudonym) was begun a year and a half prior to this investigation as two schools merged, resulting in a staff of thirty-one certified and nine non-certified staff members and 520 students. The school site for this study was selected subsequent to and as the result of the beginning teacher selection. The school district administration, investigator, and beginning teacher cooperatively worked to make the final selection of the beginning teacher for this investigation using availability, willingness to participate, and location as criteria for selection. One fourth-grade teacher from Westside was eventually selected, and she remained the participant in the case study throughout the investigation. Susan (a pseudonym), twenty-five years old, had no previous teaching experience other than substitute teaching and had completed her professional preparation two years before beginning to teach.

In addition to the beginning teacher, five teachers were selected to provide data on the technical culture of the school. Their selection was based on availability and willingness to participate. They represented teachers from kindergarten, first, second, fifth, and sixth grades. Their teaching experience varied from 3 to 20 years. The principal, assistant principal, and counselor also were interviewed to provide further data to describe and articulate the school's technical culture.

As in any study in which a researcher has focused the area of study, some limitations exist. In this study, the research participant was selected because of her proximity and availability as well as her willingness to participate. This factor, of course, allowed for convenience of time and travel. In addition, the very nature of case study was exploratory. Samples of other teachers and administrators were chosen without using any random selection procedures. Rather, they were selected based upon their willingness and ability to clearly express themselves. Again, the purpose of the data was exploratory which allowed for such an approach.

While triangulation of data collection methods was utilized, certainly some weaknesses appeared. For example, while interviews and observations provided the bulk of the data, documentary data such as memos and newsletters were relatively scarce. This is not to say they did not play a significant part in the analysis, but their level of contribution should be noted. Researcher objectivity was desired, yet no doubt researcher subjectivity entered into the process at many points.

Results

Glimpses of a Technical Culture

As teacher talk and shared experiences were explored, the substantive element of this interaction provided some clues to the teachers' relationships and thus a sense of certainty about the technical culture of the school. To explore these clues, teachers were asked, "Do you share things with other teachers? What sorts of things do you share?" and "What do you usually talk about with your colleagues?" Most teachers indicated they shared instructional materials and ideas but for reasons other than strategic planning and instructional exchange. One teacher enthusiastically told of sharing ideas with the teacher next door:

> We share a lot of the same materials. She might do something one day, and then I do it the next. For example, reading books. We do language experience from books, and I'll do it one day and send it over there and switch off for the days. We share books [and] run papers when I have an activity. I send them over there, and she sends them back over here and things like that. It's just to get ideas, and it saves preparation time.

Characteristic of uncertain and routine technical cultures, exchanges such as this suggested convenience and thus a contrived collaboration (see Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Relationships, then, among teachers reflected a lack of consensus on school goals and little collaboration in which shared goals and common beliefs led to instructional strategies and student learning. Rather, the relationships among teachers were based more on social than instructional situations. For example, teachers reported discussing family and personal concerns as well as discipline problems more often than instructional issues. The following example illustrated teachers' thoughts:

> When we start out in the mornings, we usually just ask how the evening went, about the family, what's going on, and we talk about things that went on the day before and ask, 'Are you over that?' We're real close. We know about each other's families. We know each other really well, so we talk a lot about families.

> A lot of times we discuss behavior problems. I'd be telling you less than the truth if I told you we didn't. I don't know if it's always a good thing to do, but I think a lot of times it probably isn't a good thing to do, but at the same time, you really need some release; you need some outlet because it is a lot of stress.

An exchange of "war stories" in the teachers' lounge seemed to act as a catharsis rather than a means for resolution. The recent merger of two faculties as well as a teachers' strike during the course of the study also helped shape the faculty within their context at Westside.

The meaning constructed from the additional data gathered through teacher interviews and observations suggested Westside had an uncertain and routine technical culture. This technical culture provided the work place into which Susan negotiated as a first-year teacher. It is helpful, then, to examine the data from Susan within this context.

Susan's Perceptions Within the Westside Technical Culture

Susan's perceptions of her work place and its social organization determined and influenced her practices as a beginning teacher. She perceived four distinct rules in the social organization at Westside Elementary School. She perceived teachers must: manage students to maintain a quiet, orderly atmosphere; structure their day and work to effectively perform their jobs; view their students' performances as indicative of their [teachers'] competence; and uniformly pace the curriculum. These rules led Susan to construct her reality within the context of Westside. She believed these rules to be essential to successful performance as a teacher. While all were important to her, the meaning documented by the preponderance of data suggested her perception of student management as a top priority. Indeed, evidence demonstrated she spent much of her time and energy to this end.

In mid-August, as the school year neared, Susan revealed some anxiety about her role as teacher but shared a plan in anticipation for the challenges ahead.

> Discipline frightens me a little bit, but I'm really trying to get a handle on that so that I know. I'm trying to foresee anything that comes up so that I can have an answer if they ask me how you want to do this so I can tell them exactly the way I want things done. I am trying to set up a bunch of different consequences--good and bad--if those rules aren't followed. Then I'm going to try from the very start to be very hard and strict about that and really stress those [rules] so that they know what to expect from me.

The school handbook heightened Susan's anxiety with official expectations:

> Teachers are encouraged to develop a discipline plan that is fair and positive. Rules must be thoroughly taught and revised during the year. The principal's major responsibility concerning discipline is to assist and support the total overall procedures and policies of the school. There will be times when you will need my help and I will be there to help you. (*Westside Elementary School Teachers' Handbook*, p. 9)

As Susan crossed the threshold from anticipation and planning into a second stage of implementing her plans, the floodgates opened, and she almost drowned in the ensuing rush. Susan's observations revealed her carefully developed assertive discipline plan (see Canter & Canter, 1992) seemed woefully inadequate:

> I mean I've gone days where I've put a lot of names up there, and then if they lose recess, they almost explode and they're just furious for the rest of the day. I really to one day last week go home and say, 'They're making my life miserable, and that's ridiculous.' And I was like, you know, they're not doing this to me.
>
> I had a huge fight in here last Wednesday. A huge fist fight in my room. My back was turned for a minute. One of my students will not stay in the classroom. When he decides he's ready to go, he goes--period. If he decides he leaves school, he leaves school--period. Very frustrating for me. Because I was like, 'What can I do to make this child mind me?' I'm not going to sit here and beg him, and I'm certainly not going to chase him out of the room. But then along with the talking [there are] just different things which we'll work out. It's kind of the domino effect.

Indeed, observation notes portrayed an unsettling picture in October:

> Students continued to show a general restlessness and a lot of distractive movement. Susan continued to check around for papers. One student said he didn't do his spelling. A few minutes later, he crawled under his desk and camped out. Susan seemed not to notice, as she attended to various other students around the room.
>
> About five minutes later [a later episode during the same observation], after the assignment was given, while most students were working, one boy still had not begun his work. He spent time shuffling through his papers and preparing his materials. Another student, the one who had previously crawled under his desk, quietly leaned over his desk, looking on his neighbor's spelling book. A student on the other end of the room got up to sharpen his pencil, and prolonged the process by talking to another student who asked him to sharpen his pencil as well. Susan noticed this commotion and intervened. Meanwhile, the student who had delayed beginning his assignment finally began. During the whole process, Susan seemed to constantly move around the small, crowded room like a bouncing ball.

Susan saw herself as weak and ineffective within her unsettled world, and she struggled to "mean business." She indicated strictness and consistency as the way to "mean business." These attempts resulted in some frustration, as Susan acknowledged: "Everytime that behavior occurs, stop it right then. Sometimes I try to ignore. Sometimes I just try to go on with what I'm doing. Sometimes I stop." Even though she continued to use assertive discipline in December to achieve the objectivity she believed necessary for consistency and strictness, field notes revealed her efforts sometimes fell short:

> A student across the room had his head down and appeared asleep while others were completing their assignment. Susan walked by him but did not disturb him. A student nearby him was singing a rap

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song, and Susan walked over to physically restrain him and whispered something to him to get him back on task. Another student instructed Susan to 'Put his [another students'] name on the board.' She ignored this remark. Susan moved to the door areas and signaled for the student who had remarked about the name on the board to come to her. She talked with him in the hallway right outside the door.

Right after this, Susan instructed a student to be quiet and sit down by calling his name. He responded, 'I didn't do nuthin'.' He then stood and sputtered sounds for a moment. Susan did not respond to this. She returned to her desk and checked her plan book.

Susan's inability to achieve equilibrium in her efforts toward classroom management led her to ask colleagues for advice. On one occasion, she asked other teachers how to deal with a difficult student. One teacher's response seemed simple: "You can't give him an inch, you know. If you give him an inch, he takes a mile, and that's just it. You've got to go boom, boom, boom, boom." This advice seemed deceptively straightforward; subsequently, she found it difficult to implement consistently. She attributed at least some of the struggles to variant backgrounds and learning problems:

> Some of the kids come from less than perfect homes. I didn't know if [the kids' parents] thought that when they come to school, it's my problem, just like when they go home. Some of my students, I don't think, come from homes where their parents are real educated and say, 'Okay, how was school today? Are there some things you have to work on? Did you have some homework? Are there some words you need help with?' I don't think a lot of my students have that kind of just someone asking them questions like that.

Susan's experiences with discipline problems combined with colleagues' suggestions continued to erode her confidence in her student management abilities. This was particularly significant in that she questioned her credibility among teachers. Her inability to manage students in light of this advice resulted in frustration. For example, she recalled a particularly trying experience:

> It makes me feel like I lose credibility when I can't keep one student in the class, and that bothers me. And, you know, with the fighting, it bothers me that that happens anytime regardless of what the situation is.

As tension between aspiration and reality tugged at Susan's sense of credibility, she did not abandon her efforts to gain control of her students. She clearly continued to view student management as a priority as indicated in another interview:

> Researcher -- What criteria do you think are used to determine whether or not you're a competent teacher at this school? What do you think you are judged by?
>
> Susan -- I think a lot of it is how well you manage your class. In my mind, that's what I think about. I think that when I walk by someone's room, and everybody's on task, and everybody's quiet, or even if they're in groups, and you can see that they're working together. I mean, that's what I look for.

Although Susan continued to use assertive discipline through December, she began to rethink her personal classroom management strategies. During this rethinking, she retreated more and more to herself, avoiding the collegial advice she had eagerly sought earlier in the semester. She expressed some frustration as she described her thought process: "There's got to be a better way. Your name's on the board and if you talk one more time, it's up again. I mean there's just gotta be a better way." This frustration eventually led to her to take the assertive discipline chart down from her classroom wall. This step was only a preliminary one, however, as field notes confirmed her continued use of assertive discipline: "Toward the end of the grading exercise, the students began getting a little more rowdy. Susan calmly walked over to the chalkboard and wrote two students' names on the board."

Toward the end of the first semester, Susan totally discarded assertive discipline because "it was more trouble than it was worth." She added,

> I did all those things [assertive discipline]. I filled out those sheets about what I'd do if this and this and this. I did all those things, but it's just different until you get--until you can develop something for yourself. You can't take someone else's idea and make it your own. Or you can do it, but it has to be something you feel comfortable with. I just didn't feel comfortable with assertive discipline.

After a short transition period, once Susan had adopted her own student management plan, she began to perceive her role and her relationship with her students differently as reflected in her thoughts:

> One day I decided I'm not going to yell. I'm not going to stand up there and yell anymore. I went to TESA [Teacher Expectations Student Achievement], and they talked about courtesy, and a lot of it has to do with [courtesy], and I think of lot of it has to do with their backgrounds. I think now they finally know I'm going to be there every single day. I'm going to be the same person every single day. I think a lot of it just took time to get used to it. I really do.

Rather than mechanically apply the assertive discipline approach to classroom management, she began to explore her students and how she felt about them as well as how they felt about her. This led to a change in perspective which seemed to accompany Susan's change in management strategies. She implemented a system resembling another fourth grade teacher's, and she explained her reasoning for espousing it:

> I saw Frances Davidson had her Star Students up, and it was the biggest pain to go up there and write their name on the board [as in assertive discipline], so I was like I start everyday with everybody's name on the board--she didn't have everybody's name on the board--I don't know, I just decided it was more positive reinforcement, and if your name is erased, that's it. You don't have to see it up.
>
> [Star Students] was more me. This [behavior management system] is more my own that I'm comfortable with. With assertive discipline I found [it] impossible to stop everything and go write a name up on the board. It didn't work for me.

> Researcher -- Have you seen a difference between how well this works as opposed to the other [assertive disicpline]?
>
> Susan – Yes. Because if they see their name up there, they're just waiting to get another check. This way they never see a check. Never.

With more and more success with her student management strategies, Susan's understanding of her students began to change. She began to provide more poignant descriptions of students and their relationships to her, indicating a change from the more confrontational power struggles at the beginning of the school year. She described George as "one of my ones in the beginning who made me crazy," but shared from an episode in January:

> He came in one day after school; he was just not doing anything all day. [And I asked,] 'What is the deal? What's going on with you?' And we got to talking, and I asked him, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' He said, 'Nothing.' I said, 'Oh, come on, everybody wants to be something.' He said, 'No, Mrs. Moms. I don't want to be anybody. I just want to be nobody,' and right then I just started to cry. He's just sitting over there looking at me, 'Why are you crying?' I said, 'You just broke my heart, and I don't want to ever, 20 years from now see you driving down the street and go, "There goes Nobody. I taught him [in] fourth grade.'"

By February, as Susan had more effectively asserted herself in her role as teacher and had successfully overcome many of her struggles with classroom management styles and strategies, her colleagues began to praise her and treat her with less sympathy and more approval. During the second semester, Susan bragged that other teachers were beginning to notice the changes in the fourth grade class with the bad reputation. Shortly after the second semester began, Susan shared that one of the aides who supervised the students at lunch reported that "my class was the best class she had ever taken back [from the playground to the classroom] all year." Other teachers, she said, were also making comments about her class: "I cannot believe your class in the hall. I cannot believe when I come in there how much better they are. It's like a different class." Field observation notes in January suggested these changes were occurring in the classroom as well:

> When I arrived at Susan's room, the students were seated and quietly visiting and moving about at their desks. It was clearly a transition time. Susan moved into the classroom and began class immediately by announcing they were going over the handwriting as she passed the students' sheets back to them. The class responded well and quickly. Susan would go over one sentence at a time, asking for clarification on punctuation and capitalization, and the students raised their hands and responded when called on. After completing the lesson, she asked the students how they did, and they responded with raised hands. She, in turn, responded with group praise.

Susan herself observed the differences emerging in the second semester:

> I think that maybe I'm becoming a better manager of my classroom., and that maybe I can handle those kinds of problems better.
>
> Researcher -- Is control an issue?
>
> Susan -- Well, it was. There were times when I felt like they controlled the classroom, and they controlled my lessons. I remember talking to you about feeling like I was not teaching them anything. I feel like what I'm teaching then now is pertinent and they know it, and I don't know, but for some reason when I came back after Christmas, and maybe it's just now, but I feel like the things that I've done just fit a lot better into place.

These changes, of course, influenced her all the more to focus on student management as she interacted within the social organization. Finally, as she gained more control over the students, time, and curriculum, she appeared successful at Westside Elementary. She, in essence, conformed to the technical culture already in place at Westside Elementary School.

Discussion

To more fully understand how Susan formed her perceptions of her relationships within the work place and thus how she constructed her roles as a teacher, it is helpful to reexamine the data with this in mind. Susan's perceptions of the key relationships with colleagues and students evolve as the school year progresses. First, she begins her first year of teaching with a great deal of anticipation and aspiration about what she can do. As school begins, however, reality shock hits her as she attempts to implement classroom management strategies such as assertive discipline (Canter & Canter, 1992). As she falters in her attempts, she reaches out to colleagues, as she senses they have the answers she is so desperately seeking. After all, she believes, they are veteran teachers.

Susan often asks them how they do some task or how they feel about certain issues or expectations, demonstrating an openness and willingness to inquire and to learn the ropes. Teachers' responses suggest to Susan that her ability to manage her students is a necessary component of success at Westside. Most often, however, Susan observes other teachers and listens to them without seeming to question whether *their* reality is the same. She *assumes* they see the same things she does in the same ways but have simply passed farther down the road of experience and thus can provide answers from their experience. However, as Susan seeks answers and assistance with student management, she continually perceives a discrepancy between what she is doing and what other teachers seem to be doing. Initially, this leads to more and more desperation and

frustration. Susan's assumptions about her colleagues' practices create credibility worries for her. Despite these worries, she never really confirms or questions her colleagues' practices, signifying the professionally isolated and self-reliant nature of the technical culture. The meaning derived from the data suggests Susan's perceptions of the relationships with colleagues helps shape her role within the work place at Westside.

As she encounters the realities of the work place and moves beyond the initial shock, Susan discards her initial plans and adjusts her strategies to conform to the situation. She perceives student management as important in her school; consequently, as she experiences disappointing results, she rethinks her assertive discipline plan, eventually arriving at an entirely different strategy more compatible with her personality and situation. In sum, Susan's readjustments in practices represent her interaction with the school's technical culture as well as changes in her interpretations of what the influences mean. By the second semester, Susan's practices with respect to student management are different, and as a result, she sees herself as fitting in with the veteran teachers as they begin to praise her efforts rather than provide pity and encouragement.

Educational Importance of the Study

This study presents data collected from a case study involving a beginning fourth-grade teacher in an elementary school. By examining the perceptions of the beginning teacher within the context of the technical culture of the school, a richer understanding can be gained about the experiences of first-year teachers and the world in which they work. While it may be difficult if not impossible to change a technical culture (indeed, it is composed of a myriad of perceptions and practices), inroads can be made into understanding what it is and how it works. Consequently, such data can inform teacher induction directors, principals, and veteran teachers raising their awareness of the technical cultures in which they work and thus effectively address first-year teachers' perceptions. It is not enough to simply catalog beginning teachers' perceived problems or fears. Practitioners must possess a knowledge of the motivations and beliefs behind the problems and fears and understand how crucial the context of situation is to those beliefs and motivations.

Susan did all the right things and was accepted in the workplace as a successful first-year teacher. While this appears positive on the surface, her perceptions and practices may have only served to move her into a situation which many educational restructurers and reformers are seeking to change. For example, standardized ways of accomplishing tasks, teacher isolation, and "egg crate" schools have persisted through

several reform efforts, and still exist. The organization remains much the same with relatively little change in the patterns or outcomes. Indeed, as Raywid (1990) suggests, pseudo-reform may persist rather than restructuring the fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and practices within the schools. If first-year teachers are being socialized into more of the same, that is, routinized, uncertain technical cultures in which isolation persists and teachers cover the material at specified rates, then success as a first-year teacher may be illusory. If not illusory, then misplaced at best. The rules roles, and relationships within the technical culture are not fundamentally changed; rather, they are crystallized. Indeed, the intractability of the technical culture may very well be the biggest challenge of all.

Susan's reality was largely derived from her perceptions of what she believed the rules, roles, and relationships to be at Westside rather than technical subskills delineated on a checklist or in the school handbook. The relationships in place and the perceived rules essentially seal Susan's primary role as a disciplinarian above everything else. Indeed, meaning constructed from the data from this study demonstrates a beginning teacher's perceptions of the social and cultural factors have a greater influence than formally stated goals and objectives. The evidence from this investigation demands that efforts to assist beginning teachers must consider the context of situation rather than a mythological uniform teaching culture (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). While checklists and other generic instruments may be helpful to beginning teachers, data from this investigation point out the more subtle and complex nature of a first-year teacher's experience and socialization within the context of a technical culture as important.

Susan's perceived significant relationships, rules, and roles affected her beliefs and practices at Westside as she interacted with the technical culture. While this study sought to simply explore these perceptions, it is clear Susan's story is not finished, nor is the task of understanding what her story means. The data provided by this investigation reveal one teacher's reality and her perceptions and practices within that reality, yet there are many schools and many first-year teachers. Each school may have different rules, roles, and relationships within its social organization, but the essence will still remain--a framework will result, and the better educators understand the framework, the more effectively than can educate the students within it.

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